

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAM-01 IO-10 ACDA-05 /082 W

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R 151020Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1228

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 3432

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFBOR, PFOR, SA, IZ, SY

SUBJECT: IRAQI-SYRIAN CONFLICT; SAUDI EXPRESSION OF
SYMPATHY FOR IRAQ

1. DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER MOHAMMAD MAS'UD TOLD THE
AMBASSADOR MAY 13 THAT THE SYRIAN-IRAQI CONFLICT IS
FAR FROM FINISHED. LIKE MOST SAUDIS, HE IS
AMUSED AT THE SIGHT OF A SAUDI MINISTER, AHMED
ZAKI YAMANI, MEDIATING BETWEEN TWO BRANCHES OF A
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY. HE IS LESS AMUSED AT THE
MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM.

2. YAMANI, IN THE AMBASSADOR'S LAST CONVERSATION
WITH HIM, WAS STILL TALKING OF THE "POLITICAL
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DIFFICULTIES" BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES WHICH

EXACERBATED THE WATER PROBLEM AND WHICH, IN FACT, SEEMED TO OVERSHADOW IT. MAS'UD'S VIEW IS THAT THE PROBLEM IS ALMOST STRICTLY ONE OF WATER RIGHTS, AND THAT IT WOULD BE JUST AS PRESSING UNDER ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT IN EITHER CAPITAL.

3. MAS'UD SAID THE ISSUE WOULD HAVE TO BE MORE CAREFULLY DEFINED BY TECHNICIANS, BUT THE FIRST REPORTS SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT THE UPSTREAM USERS, SYRIA AND TURKEY, WERE DEPRIVING IRAQ OF QUANTITIES OF WATER WHICH IT HAD PREVIOUSLY USED. THE FILLING OF THE DAMS ON THE EUPHRATES, COMBINED WITH LIGHT RAINFALLS THIS YEAR, WERE REDUCING SOUTHERN IRAQ - AS THE IRAQIS CLAIMED - TO A SALT DESERT. IF THIS IS TRUE, MAS'UD SAID, AND IT DID SEEM TO BE TRUE, THEN IT WOULD SEEM THAT IRAQ WOULD BE JUSTIFIED IN TAKING ANY ACTION TO PROTECT ITS PEOPLE FROM DEATH BY THIRST OR HUNGER. THE AMBASSADOR COMMENTED THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THE MINISTER PERFECTLY WELL: WHEN GOVERNMENTS ARE BEING "STRANGULATED" THEY DO TAKE DESPERATE ACTIONS.

4. MAS'UD THOUGHT THAT THE ONLY SOLUTION WOULD BE FOR SYRIA TO RELEASE MORE OF THE WATER FOR IRRIGATION IN IRAQ. HE SAID THAT TURKEY HAD NO RIGHT TO INCREASE THE WATER LEVEL IN THE KEBAN DAM FOR POWER PURPOSES WHEN WATER WAS NEEDED FOR AGRICULTURE DOWNSTREAM.

5. COMMENT: THE IRAQIS SEEM TO HAVE MADE A VERY CONVINCING CASE. THE SAUDIS - AND PARTICULARLY MAS'UD - WOULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO GIVE IRAQ THE BENEFIT OF ANY DOUBT IN ANY DISPUTE WITH SYRIA. SAUDI ARABIA'S GOOD RELATIONS WITH SYRIA ARE CONSIDERABLY OLDER AND MORE SOUNDLY BUILT THAN THE ONES NEWLY CONSTRUCTED BY PRINCE FAHD AND SADDAM HUSSEIN.

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